

## JAMAICA AND THE SAINT DOMINGUE SLAVE REVOLT, 1791-1793<sup>1</sup>

ONCE the two largest sugar colonies in the slave-owning Caribbean, Jamaica and Haiti trace their separate paths of development back to the revolutionary struggles of the 1790's. While the French colony of Saint Domingue was transformed in a way few societies have ever been, Jamaica remained seemingly untouched by the conflagration that consumed its neighbour. When the slaves and free coloureds of Saint Domingue rebelled in the autumn of 1791, Jamaican society faced the greatest challenge of its history. The dramatic spectacle of violent self-liberation was acted out almost before the eyes of its blacks and mulattoes, while the ruling white elite experienced a dilemma that seemed to oppose its prosperity to its survival. This paper looks at the reaction of different social groups in the island in an attempt to explain its continuing stability.

### I. THE DEFENSIVE REACTION

Early in September 1791, news reached Kingston that in the northern plain of Saint Domingue and its surrounding mountains up to 100,000 slaves were in rebellion. To the Jamaican planters, the garish images of revolt that filtered through that autumn from Cap François must have seemed like an enactment of their very worst nightmares — white captives hung from trees with hooks through their chins; men sawn in half; children impaled; women raped on the corpses of their husbands and fathers; hundreds of plantations ablaze. The island militia was immediately called out, though in the previous nine years, so unpopular was militia service, it had not been assembled once. Throughout the

<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper was made possible by grants from the Social Science Research Council and the Leverhulme Foundation. Its main sources are the *Royal Gazette of Jamaica* (hereafter: *RG*) and the Governor's papers in the Public Record Office, CO 137/88-91. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum. Readers requiring more detailed documentation are referred to D. Geggus, "The British Occupation of Saint Domingue 1793-98", D. Phil. thesis, York University, 1978, to be published by Oxford University Press as *Slavery, War and Revolution*, (1981).

autumn and winter, whites rich and poor, free blacks and mulattoes drilled, paraded and patrolled with ramshackle pomp. As soon as it became clear that the revolt would not be quickly put down, committees of security were established in every parish to look for evidence of sedition —one thinks of Revolutionary France and America. The Assembly called for more troops, particularly cavalry,<sup>2</sup> and the cry was taken up in London by the Society of Merchants and Planters. The colony's Agent ordered a quantity of small arms to be sent out. Isolated cannon lying around the island were collected up. The purchase of gunpowder was made more difficult. In the ports, new arrivals were strictly vetted, at least in theory, and Spanish vagrants and French free coloureds already in Jamaica were deported, if they could not find two householders to vouch for them. On December 10th, martial law was declared for the duration of the Christmas holidays.<sup>3</sup>

As a second line of defense, the planters felt moved to effect some minor ameliorations in the slave laws, following up the reforms of 1788. Lord Grenville, when Home Secretary, had already urged that the slaves' lot be improved and Henry Dundas, his successor, though not an Abolitionist, could not resist pointing out that propaganda was by no means the most obvious explanation of the revolt in Saint Domingue.<sup>4</sup> As soon as the Assembly met in October, we find Governor Effingham suggesting with both tact and discretion that something might be done for those "who do not wilfully reject the happiness that you offer them". The Council concurred, no less discreetly, and the Assembly replied with magnanimity it would continue to make "more secure and easy" the lives of "the most defenceless part of the community". What this actually meant was the imposition of certain legal obligations concerning the upkeep of provision grounds, the prohibition of mutilation, of iron collars and heavy weights and chains. Even so, it was not till March 1792, when tension had considerably lessened, one notes, that the necessary legal amendments were made.<sup>5</sup>

Another sensitive area in imperial relations that was spotlighted by the crisis was the question of the payment of troops. In Britain, the rising price of sugar had made the British planters increasingly unpopular, and

<sup>2</sup>This was not such a foolish choice for a mountainous colony as some have said. In the plains, where most of Jamaica lived, cavalry provided a mobility that was vital in holding down a large subject population. In Saint Domingue, perspiring white infantry wearing woollen jackets and carrying 12 lb. muskets were easily out-run by the black insurgents.

<sup>3</sup>RG 1791, nos. 44-52; CO 137/89-90, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup>CO 137/89 and 90, letters to Effingham, 21st April 1791 and 7th January 1792.

<sup>5</sup>Journals of the Assembly (hereafter: JAJ) IX 1-5.

the Jamaican demand for additional forces was attacked in the press. Far from rushing out extra regiments — although one was ordered northwards from Barbados — the Government replied it was actually planning, in the interests of economy, to reduce the colonial garrisons. Any troops over and above their peacetime quotas would have to be paid and fed by the colonists themselves. Both the Assembly and the Society of Merchants and Planters insisted they were entitled to protection free of charge like other British subjects. For once, however, the Government was on safe ground in demanding money from a colonial Assembly. It knew, on Governor Williamson's advice,<sup>6</sup> that the Jamaicans would pay up to protect their crops, now greatly inflated in value thanks to the rebel blacks of Saint Domingue. The Government response, therefore, was not exactly complacent, though just how seriously it took the prospect of a race war in the Caribbean is not easy to gauge. No slave revolt had ever lasted very long and the news from Saint Domingue was intermittently encouraging. In Jamaica itself, the mood oscillated between pessimism and hope, never reaching panic or despair. At first, the Assembly tried to have the extra troops and avoid pledging payment. The Governor refused. Then, under pressure from taxpayers for retrenchment it decided to take only a corps of dragoons. In May, however, having heard that the whites of Saint Marc had been murdered in their beds, it agreed to take three more regiments and pay for them if forced to.<sup>7</sup>

It is most important to realize that the number of troops in the British West Indies was already before the slave revolt at a record level. Not only had the island garrisons remained at wartime strength after 1783 but they had been further reinforced during the international crises over Holland and Nootka Sound in 1788 and 1790. Jamaica's crumbling fortifications had also been undergoing repairs. When the Plaine du Nord went up in flames, therefore, white Jamaica was fortunate to possess a garrison of some 2,000 troops. In Saint Domingue, the same number of soldiers faced twice as many slaves in a colony almost three times as large. Moreover, when war broke out 18 months later, there were, because of the reinforcements called in by the Assembly, 3,000 troops on the island. In five years, its garrison had almost doubled.

## II. THE REACTION OF THE SLAVES

The size of the garrison is worth stressing, for the failure of Jamaica's slaves to follow the example of the "Mingo ngra" about whom they sang

<sup>6</sup> CO 137/89, Williamson to Dundas, 6th November 1791. Adam Williamson became Governor in November on the death of Lord Effingham.

<sup>7</sup> Jamaica Archives, Council Minutes, 5th May 1792; RG 1792, no. 18 and 19.

songs is not easy to explain, especially in view of their rebellious past. Jamaican slavery was less brutal than in preceding decades but that was also true of slavery in Saint Domingue. More importantly, slave society in Jamaica had become more creolized and therefore more stable than in the rapidly-growing French colony. The Dominguan revolt, it is true, (though often forgotten) was essentially led and planned by creoles, but creoles who knew they could use the anomic energies of vast numbers of Africans. Nonetheless, it has not hitherto been appreciated that at this time Jamaica, too, experienced an unprecedentedly great influx of Africans, difficult to assimilate, even difficult to feed, which substantially changed the character of its society. In the decade following 1788, the process of creolization was interrupted by a wave of panic importing, sparked off by the campaign to abolish the slave trade. Demand for slaves was further increased by the revolution in Saint Domingue, which led to an expansion of the Jamaican economy and also reduced the re-export trade. While retained slave imports averaged 5,662 *per annum* in 1784-87, they rose to 10,596 *per annum* in 1789-91 and throughout the 1790's they averaged close to 12,000 *per annum*. In 1787 5,703 slaves were imported; in 1792, about 18,000; in 1793, 25,960.<sup>8</sup> It was doubtless important, therefore, and perhaps not accidental, that most of the new arrivals were Ibo and "Congo", reputedly tractable peoples, many of them women and children. Imports of the more rebellious Gold Coast and Slave Coast Negroes declined sharply in this period.<sup>9</sup>

In Jamaica, of course, white society had not been shattered by the French Revolution as it had in Saint Domingue. Nevertheless, it was undermined *vis à vis* the slaves by the Abolitionist campaign in England, which was universally discussed in the colony, to many Jamaicans' alarm. Moreover, as in the French islands, it was said that Abolitionist tracts were communicated to the slaves by free coloureds. Early in 1791, a revolt had flared up in Dominica and British planters warned of a "new Temper and Ideas" among their slaves. There was no sign of rebellion in Jamaica, Williamson reported in July and August, but he would not like to predict, he said, what would happen if Parliament passed an Abolition bill.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> P.R.O., CUST 17/15; CO 137/91, *passim*; J.A., Council Minutes, 7th August 1793; British Library, Additional Manuscript 12431, 24.

<sup>9</sup> P. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: a Census* (Madison: 1969) 159-162; D. Geggus, "The Slaves of British-Occupied Saint Domingue", to appear in *Caribbean Studies*, part II. The collapse of the French slave trade in 1792 probably also encouraged British slavers to move southwards.

<sup>10</sup> West India Committee Library, London, Society of Merchants and Planters Minute Book III, 142; CO 137/90, the Assembly to Fuller 4th and 5th November 1791; CO 137/89, Williamson to Grenville 4th July 1791.

The reaction of the slaves to the news from Saint Domingue is difficult to assess. While individual planters were known to cover up or lie about plots that involved their own workforces, it was of general concern to the plantocracy to present a picture of peace and internal security to its metropolitan creditors, on whom it relied so much. The Island Agent in London was instructed by the Assembly not to allow any expression of danger to get into the British newspapers. On the other hand, many of the alarming stories that circulated were found by the committees of security to be exaggerated or baseless.<sup>11</sup> One thing is certain. As soon as news from Saint Domingue reached Jamaica, it spread immediately among the slave population. As early as 18th September, Williamson was writing:

Many slaves here are very inquisitive and intelligent, and are immediately informed of every kind of news that arrives. I do not hear of their having shewn any sign of revolt, though they have composed songs of the negroes having made a rebellion at Hispaniola with their usual chorus to it; and I have not a doubt but there are numbers who are ripe for any mischief and whenever any insurrection begins it will be . . . on the North side of the island.

By early November, Williamson thought perhaps the slaves were now tending to be "insolent" but felt sure all was well. In Clarendon parish, "head negroes" had been overheard talking of destroying the whites and dividing up their lands. "Negroes in the French country" they said, "were men", and they hoped the Jamaican slaves, too, would rebel. Interestingly, they were arrested but then discharged, as it was thought best not to make a fuss. Clearly this was talking rather than plotting. In Westmoreland, it was said, 3,000 blacks, provided with alcohol, gathered to celebrate Wilberforce's birthday but were peaceably persuaded to disperse.<sup>12</sup>

It was in the course of November that alarm began to spread among the whites. The slaves were now, someone wrote from Kingston, "so different a people from what they were . . . I am convinced the Ideas of Liberty have sunk so deep in the Minds of *all* Negroes, that whenever the greatest precautions are not taken they will rise". The fate of Saint Domingue, he or she thought, would probably decide their conduct.<sup>13</sup> Much significance was attached to the fact that the wealthier, more industrious slaves, those who took greatest care of their gardens,

<sup>11</sup> See below, note 14, and letter to Fuller, cited in note 10.

<sup>12</sup> CO 137/89, Williamson to Dundas, 6th November 1791 and anonymous letter extract of the same date.

<sup>13</sup> CO 137/89, anonymous letter, 18th November 1791.

suddenly neglected them. More specifically alarming, blacksmiths were said to have made cutlasses in their dinner break, and on the Fairfield plantation lead shot was cast in the forge, by carpenters, when the whites were on militia duty. Elsewhere, hidden cartridges were found. Large quantities of powder, it seems, were purchased by black or Spanish peddlers. Jamaicans remembered the conspiracy of Mackandal, the Dominguan leader already passed into legend. Several whites were warned by slaves that a rebellion was planned, and various slaves reported hearing talk about weapons and rebellion, often among the Coromantees. One "daring and desperate spirit", a Coromantee 10 years in Jamaica, "acute" and "sensible", confessed that a revolt was planned for Christmas but that if prevented it would take place after crop time, when the ships had left. He had intended to join in, he said, because they were his people. He was astonished, however, to see the Maroons join the whites when the militia was mustered.<sup>14</sup>

At least one band of runaways, nonetheless, decided at this time to begin attacking the whites. Led by Brutus, an escapee from the work house it was 18 strong and had been living in symbiosis with the slaves of the Brampton Bryan estate in Trelawny, trading with them, attending their dances and possessing wives on the plantation. The slaves on the estate, moreover, now threatened to join Brutus if their master did not return and replace their cruel overseer. However, before there was any violence, Brutus was captured by the militia in January.<sup>15</sup>

There would seem small doubt that Jamaica came far closer to a slave revolt in 1791 than has previously been realised. While the activity of the Coromantee community harks back to the rebellions of 1760 and 1765, it was the conspiring by skilled slaves, those with some stake in the system, that most worried contemporaries. Looking forward to the Christmas rebellion of 1830, it was unpleasantly reminiscent of events in Saint Domingue. And yet, nothing happened. It must be said there is little evidence of panic amongst the whites. Some scoffed at talk of rebellion. In Trelawny, the planters suspended their committee of security, (foolishly, thought the committee in St. James). Williamson always remained sanguine, at least in his correspondence confident that the measures taken would kill any thought of revolt. This, it seems, is what happened. The Christmas holiday was the crucial test, since the slaves, as

<sup>14</sup>CO 137/90, report of the St. James committee of security, 13th January 1792, and Williamson to Dundas, 27th November 1791.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.; RG 1792, no. 2, 22.

As already seen, friction arose between Whitehall and the Assembly over the question of payment for defence. The Assembly also became extremely unpopular within Jamaica when it increased taxation to pay for the extra troops. In several parishes — the majority, according to the Governor — smallholders met to decry its "extravagance" and "folly," and petitioned for its dissolution. Assemblyman Bryan Edwards denounced the petitioners as "characters . . . having neither property nor reputation to lose", trying to act as a Fourth Estate, "never so happy as in times of public confusion".<sup>17</sup> They clearly had less property to protect and less money to spend than the sugar planters of the legislature, and may also have lived in upland areas where cavalry were of limited use. As at le Cap, urban dwellers with no direct stake in the plantation system showed little enthusiasm for defending it. Poor whites complained they could not afford uniforms and arms to serve in the militia. When a rumour circulated that the Assembly was going to introduce corporal punishment into the militia, the Kingston company rioted and burned in effigy Assemblyman Henry Shirley.<sup>18</sup>

Terrifying or simply disturbing for the whites of Jamaica, the revolution in Saint Domingue was the subject of mixed feelings. The plantocracy, in its struggle with the anti-slavery lobby in England, was on balance strengthened by it. It could now argue both that the "wild and enthusiastic Doctrines" of the Abolitionists led to revolution and also that slavery in Jamaica was a beneficent institution, since its slaves had not rebelled. The revolt, therefore, and its failure to spread to Jamaica, gave cause for some self-congratulation, which is evinced in the Addresses of the Assembly. In November, we find the Island Agent pressing Dundas to get the Abolition question debated in Parliament and thus quickly laid to rest.<sup>19</sup> Rather more tangibly, the destruction of its rival meant higher prices for Jamaican produce and overnight its ailing economy became once more prosperous. The disruption of French trade had already, in fact, brought beneficial results, for at the beginning of the year merchants all over Europe had placed large orders for British sugar, shrewdly anticipating misfortune in the French islands. Governor Effingham had then remarked that "as a man" he lamented the situation in Saint Domingue, but "as an Englishman" he rejoiced.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See below, note 23.

<sup>18</sup> Custos, Chief Judge and Lieutenant-Colonel of militia for the parish of St. George. Shirley was a leader of the pro-government faction in the Assembly and one of the most active members of its Committee of Correspondence, frequently drawing up reports and, with Bryan Edwards, drafting its Addresses.

<sup>19</sup> CO 137/89, letter of 18th November 1791.

<sup>20</sup> See Historical Manuscripts Commission, Fortescue Mss. II, 29; CO 137/89, Effingham to Grenville, 19th March 1791.



How did the Jamaicans now react to the Dominguan planters' appeals for aid? Not surprisingly, Effingham refused to part with any troops. The quantity of guns and ammunition he sent, some writers have thought deliberately meagre but this seems unjustified. The Governor did what he could. Like Admiral Affleck, who commanded the ships he sent to le Cap and Port au Prince, he seems to have considered the French planters' "predicament" a Common cause and very alarming to us their neighbours.<sup>21</sup> The Assembly apparently agreed. "Sympathising most feelingly with its unfortunate neighbours", it thanked the Governor for sending arms. Although commercially they had gained a "temporary advantage", the planters complained that, "the tenure both of our properties and lives is precarious while our slaves have such a precedent of the triumph of savage anarchy".<sup>22</sup>

Some, nevertheless, sympathised more feelingly than others. Effingham suggested, in private, that the Assembly ought to give financial assistance to the Dominguan, as the House of Commons had done to the victims of the Lisbon earthquake.<sup>23</sup> A committee chaired by Bryan Edwards recommended that a loan of £100,000 be granted to the Colonial Assembly at le Cap out of public funds. This, however, was decisively rejected. So, too, by 18 votes to 9, was a subsequent proposal to lend £10,000. The chances of repayment were slim. However, in February the Assembly voted 20 to 5 to allow £10,000 worth of supplies to be exchanged for bills drawn by the Intendant of Saint Domingue on the French Treasury and made payable in London. Even though the transaction made good business sense,<sup>24</sup> it aroused considerable opposition both at the grass roots and from the Governor's Council. At the parish meetings mentioned above, smallholders protested that their taxes were being "wantonly" increased for the benefit of foreigners. Among the first to complain were the Blue Mountain parishes of St. Andrew's and St. David's. It is interesting that Jamaica's coffee planters were probably the main beneficiaries of Saint Domingue's collapse,<sup>25</sup> but there is little to suggest that they specifically were behind this movement, which was probably less machiavellian and xenophobic than simply anti-

<sup>21</sup> P.R.O., ADM 1/244, Affleck to Stephens, 8th September 1791.

<sup>22</sup> JAJ IX, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> This paragraph is based on RG 1792, nos. 16-18, and JAJ IX 50-102.

<sup>24</sup> The supplies were to be purchased in Kingston, and the Island Assembly would anyway have had to buy commercial paper to pay its London debts, (which were mainly for arms). There was still an element of risk, of course, for the bills might be repudiated in Paris.

<sup>25</sup> The price of muscovado, though rising, was overtaken by that of coffee in 1792. Coffee exports, 3 million pounds in 1791, more than doubled in four years and sextupled in eleven.



government. Bryan Edwards struck back at its protagonists in the pages of the *Royal Gazette*. The voice of the plantocracy, he spoke of "sound policy", "true humanity" and "our sister colony". The whole Assembly, he said, believed that Jamaica's fate was bound up with that of Saint Domingue. Even if the bills proved worthless, it would be £10,000 well spent.

The Council, however, influenced by Williamson, now become Governor, disallowed the measure, as it "deeply implicated national with colonial policy", was not justified by "State expediency" and lay outside the scope of the Assembly's powers. This created uproar among the Assemblymen, always sensitive on such issues. Unanimously they declared the Council's intervention "officious, indecent, assuming and irregular, derogatory to the honour and injurious to the privileges of this House". Somewhat unfairly, they attributed it to "that odious and secret exaltation at the misfortune of a colony whose disastrous situation may yet be our own".<sup>26</sup> Williamson prorogued the Assembly but it would not back down. As the Council had acted unconstitutionally, in trying to amend a money bill, he finally had to give way. Ironically, the Dominguans then decided they did not need a loan.

The slave revolution, therefore, evoked from the Jamaican planters a show of class solidarity with their commercial rivals in Saint Domingue, which cut across the political divide and somewhat increased class tensions in white Jamaica. The two colonies also grew closer together in other ways in this period. Refugees from Saint Domingue began to arrive in Kingston in September, 1791. A great deal of money was also transferred there for safe keeping. By April 1792, after a sudden influx from western Saint Domingue, there were as many French in the Capital as British.<sup>27</sup> Most returned during the next 12 months, but the onset of war brought an even greater flood — refugees, p.o.w.'s, envoys from Europe and hundreds of luckless individuals who tried to flee to the U.S. but were captured by Jamaican privateers. The privateers were "more savage than Blackbeard the pirate ever was"<sup>28</sup> but plantation society proved hospitable. Some of the French found jobs; a great many were supported by individual acts of charity and by a public subscription, which raised £1,800 in a few weeks. Henry Shirley entertained numerous Dominguans of all political persuasions and Bryan Edwards, too, made many new friends. In this they were presumably not alone.

<sup>26</sup> See RG 1792, nos. 10 and 11.

<sup>27</sup> Universidad Católica de Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic, Documentos AGI-AGS 1750-99, II (typescripts), González to Vaillant, 15 de abril de 1792.

<sup>28</sup> CO 137/50, Williamson to Nepean, 19th October 1793.

Commercial links between the two colonies also grew stronger, as the French trade laws were increasingly ignored during the Revolution. Jamaican merchants had long supplied southern Saint Domingue with slaves and manufactured goods; according to some, they were responsible for its development. Dominguan cotton, from the Artibonite and the South, was much sought after and since 1787 could be legally imported into Jamaica. In September 1792, 200,000 pounds were sold in one day.<sup>29</sup> Dominguan coffee was also in demand. Among the main figures involved in the intercolonial trade was Alexandre Lindo, a Jewish merchant with partnerships in Kingston and London. Active in the slave trade, particularly the slave re-export trade, he was accustomed to discounting French commercial paper and had supplied ammunition and food to the revolutionary Assembly of the West Province. Equally prominent, was Alexander Donaldson, who held the contract to supply provisions to the island garrison and naval station, and also traded with the Spaniards of Cuba. He and fellow Scot Alexander Forbes were members of a British company actually established in Port au Prince, which was concerned largely with cotton. Its principal partner, James Grant Forbes, was to be imprisoned there in November 1793. In Kingston, Alexander Forbes was closely connected with the refugee community and, along with Shirley, helped set up and administer the public fund for its support.<sup>30</sup>

#### IV. THE FREE COLOUREDS

When the Assembly met for the new session in October 1792, it was able to congratulate itself on the peaceful and prosperous state of the island. Within a month, however, it again had cause for alarm. A number of Kingston free coloureds petitioned that certain of their legal disabilities be removed, for example, restrictions on inherited property and debarment from testifying in court against whites. Occurring just when the mulattoes were beginning to dominate affairs in Saint Domingue, the movement had a sinister appearance. George Hibbert, the merchant, called the petition a "germ of evil". Its demands, however, were mild and its proponents, elders of the Methodist church, had requested Assemblymen Henry Shirley to put forward their case. He refused.

<sup>29</sup> RG 1792, no. 36, 19.

<sup>30</sup> See J.A., Vice-Admiralty Court Papers, 1793 and 1794; Archives Nationales, Paris, D. xxv 31/324, Reignier du Timat to Lévy, 1 décembre 1793. It is not clear if they were connected with Turnbull, Forbes and Co. of London, who traded a good deal in France and, in the spring of 1793, began making substantial loans to Dominguan refugees in Britain. They definitely had relations with Thomas Forbes of Nassau, which port after July 1792 was allowed to admit French sugar.

Leading white Jamaicans seemed to have agreed that the mulattoes' "complaints were just and needed redress but that any concessions at that moment might encourage them to try and exact full political equality by leading the slaves to revolt". Free coloureds, it should be realised, made up about two-fifths of the militia. Even so, they were nowhere near as powerful, numerically or economically, as the Dominguan free coloureds. The richest of them, moreover, opposed the petition. The episode had no immediate sequel but left the whites the more uneasy about developments in Saint Domingue.<sup>31</sup>

#### V. WAR WITH FRANCE: THE PLANTERS' DILEMMA

With the outbreak of war in February 1793, Jamaica had again to face the question of direct aid to Saint Domingue. This time, however, the implications were more heavy than in 1791. Any attempt to restore order might now lead to the incorporation of Saint Domingue into the British Empire. As a direct competitor, the French colony would ruin Jamaica. In addition, the removal of troops would increase the island's vulnerability to attack at a time when French p.o.w.'s were crowding into the capital. The pontoons were overflowing and in May there was a partially successful break-out from Bath prison. Republican prisoners on parole in Kingston donned swords and cockades and proved disturbingly fond of singing *Ça Ira*.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, though the slaves remained quiet, imports from Africa continued to rise. In the 12 months before July, more than 23,000 were imported. In Clarendon parish, there were over twice as many new Africans as in any previous year. As a result of this great influx of whites and blacks, the early summer brought an acute shortage of foodstuffs, and when the maize crop failed, famine and possible revolt were feared.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, however, defensive arguments for a pre-emptive intervention were stronger than ever. Williamson reported in April that rumours of a general emancipation in Saint Domingue made it very much in the Jamaican planters' interest to do all they could to halt the revolution. In June, we find Henry Shirley and other wealthy colonists providing and fitting out a ship to carry a group of refugees to join the Spanish forces then invading Saint Domingue. They wanted to see order

<sup>31</sup> See B.L., Add. Ms. 12431, 223-233; CO 137/91, correspondence for December 1792. The petitioned-for reforms were implemented five years later.

<sup>32</sup> RG 1793, nos. 21, 25 and 35.

<sup>33</sup> J. A., Council Minutes, 7th August 1793; RG 1793, no. 31, 22, which says that about 30,000 slaves were imported between October and July.

restored as soon as possible — before, perhaps, Britain could get involved. Whatever their motives, Governor Williamson sent along a naval escort, and he, awaiting instructions from Whitehall, was eager to see Britain intervene. Many West Indians clearly regarded helping the Domingians as helping themselves. Thus, one of the subscribers to the refugees' relief fund signed himself "An enemy to Anarchy". The pernicious "doctrine of Equality" must be stamped out, wrote a Scots merchant from Dominica, and "the brave and generous French royalists" saved.<sup>34</sup> Having lived in Guadeloupe, however, before the Revolution, he went on to plead for "the lives and properties of the British subjects" in the French colonies. For merchants in the intercolonial trade, defence was not the only issue. British connections with the Windward Islands were doubtless more extensive than with Saint Domingue but the Jamaican merchants, certainly, had good reason for wanting peace restored among their French neighbours. The slave revolt had ruined the slave re-export trade, not only because the Domingians stopped buying slaves but also because the Spaniards, instead of coming to Kingston, could now purchase them "dog cheap" from the French.<sup>35</sup> Saint Domingue continued to buy "dry goods" from Jamaica but otherwise its planters insisted on dollars in return for their cotton and coffee. Since the Spaniards ceased trading in Jamaica, dollars became extremely scarce. Moreover, once war was declared, all trade with Saint Domingue was disrupted by the Royal Navy, and merchants like Lindo and Donaldson found their cargoes seized even if carried by neutral vessels. The privateers, of course, profited from the state of war, and some traders even sold arms to the black insurgents in return for plantation pillage.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, if stability returned to the colony, Jamaica's merchants well knew they could drive a thriving trade restocking and refurbishing its estates.

Another interest group happy to see a British move into Saint Domingue and, moreover, close to the Governor, were the civilian officials. Often merchants themselves, it was they who would staff the Customs and administration of an occupied colony. Among them were John Rousselet, Williamson's protégé, and Edward Corbett, later to be famous for his reports on Toussaint Louverture. The Island Secretary and Agent-General, George Atkinson, was to decline the post of Agent-

<sup>34</sup> National Library of Scotland, Ms. 1075, Barry to Pitt, 25th August 1793.

<sup>35</sup> See CO 137/90, Williamson to Dundas, 4th September 1793; *RG* 1793, no. 30.

<sup>36</sup> J. A., Vice-Admiralty Court Papers 1793, papers of 'La Marguerite', 'Peggy', 'Beaver'; Colville of Culross Papers, (courtesy of Lord Colville), St. Domingo notebook.

General for the Saint Domingue expedition, as he thought Martinique would be a richer plum. Nonetheless, he left hotfoot for London and offered his services in financing the occupation.<sup>37</sup> More generally, any Jamaicans who wanted to remove from their midst the rapidly-growing body of refugees, becoming both a financial burden and a health hazard,<sup>38</sup> may also have favoured intervention in Saint Domingue.

Williamson, therefore, faced a difficult problem — Dominguan clamouring for intervention, Jamaicans distinctly ambivalent; the chance of an imperial *coup de main* of gigantic importance but scant means to carry it out. Whitehall, he learned on July 23rd, was favourable but for the time being unable to send any assistance. His troops lacked ammunition and provisions and possessed neither tents nor entrenching-tools. Even worse, there were only two frigates on the Jamaica Station. At Saint Domingue, there were four and a ship of the line; a month earlier, there had been three ships of the line and six frigates. Williamson proposed an expedition but the Station Commodore vetoed the idea as unsafe.<sup>39</sup> The contemporary picture of Britain as a maritime colossus whose fleets and armies would storm through the Caribbean was ironically unrealistic. Only more ironic was the unseaworthiness of the French man of war that the Commodore feared and which scarcely dared leave port in case it met a British ship. Similarly the Spaniards in Santo Domingo, whose supposedly huge land forces caused great alarm to the British and Republicans, were paralysed by fear of overextending themselves.<sup>40</sup> Only because the French squadron dispersed in the course of July and August, did an expedition to Saint Domingue become possible.

At the same time, pressure for intervention mounted. In July, the town of Cap François was burned to the ground and the Republican Commissioner Sonthonax moved swiftly towards freeing all the slaves in Saint Domingue. He had "diabolical" designs on Jamaica, it seemed. The spectre of black revolt, now allied to a hostile European power with its resources of guns and ships, achieved a new dimension. Dominguan

<sup>37</sup> *The St. Domingo Review* (Kingston: n.d.), anon. (probably by John Rousselet), 47; CO 137/50, Atkinson to Nepean, 20th October 1793.

<sup>38</sup> D. Geggus, "Yellow fever in the 1790s: the British Army in occupied Saint Domingue", *Medical History*, 1979, no. 1, 38-58, pp. 43-44.

<sup>39</sup> Colville of Culross Papers, St. Domingo notebook; CO 137/91, Williamson to Dundas 31st July 1793. The Jamaica Station possessed three or four frigates and a 50 gun ship but they had to patrol from Honduras to the Bahamas.

<sup>40</sup> See A.N., D. xxv 54/521, log of the 'Jupiter'; Dr. Geggus, "The Volte-Face of Toussaint Louverture", to appear in *Revue française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*.

privateers, furthermore, began to attack Jamaican shipping. A force of 600 troops was put together and on September 9th they set sail for Saint Domingue. Crowds cheered their departure, yet many prominent Jamaicans were unhappy to see them go. The Assembly approved but was uneasy about the strength of the garrison. Within one or two months, however, having reflected, as Williamson said, that it probably meant the salvation of Jamaica, the planters were "perfectly content".<sup>41</sup> Reconciled, he meant, to one horn of their dilemma rather than the other. The colony's future, and that of Saint Domingue, seemed to hang in the balance.

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<sup>41</sup> CO 137/92, 51-63.